



United States Attorney's Office
District of Columbia

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NEWS RELEASE

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Maryland Woman Pleads Guilty to Theft of Public Money and Aggravated Identity Theft

Defendant fraudulently obtained more than \$77,000 in unemployment compensation by using social security numbers of other individuals

WASHINGTON - A 43-year-old Bowie, Maryland woman, Rhonda Dale Robinson, has pled guilty to one count of Theft of Public Money and two counts of Aggravated Identity Theft, Acting U.S. Attorney Channing D. Phillips; Charles Willoughby, Inspector General of the District of Columbia Office of the Inspector General (D.C. OIG); Joseph Persichini, Jr., Assistant Director in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Washington Field Office; and Gordon S. Heddell, Inspector General of the Office of the Inspector General, U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), announced today.

Robinson entered her guilty plea on Friday, May 29, 2009, in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia before the Honorable Henry H. Kennedy, Jr. The defendant faces a statutory maximum sentence of ten years of incarceration for Theft of Public Money, and a mandatory sentence of two years of incarceration for each count of Aggravated Identity Theft. The sentencing hearing is scheduled for September 10, 2009.

According to the Statement of Offense filed with the court by the government, the District of Columbia Department of Employment Services ("Department of Employment Services") is a department or agency of the District of Columbia government which is responsible for administering unemployment compensation for valid unemployment claims made in the District of Columbia. States pay for unemployment benefits through payroll taxes levied on employers. These taxes are deposited into the Federal Unemployment Trust Fund that maintains separate accounts for each state and the District of Columbia. The U.S. Department of Labor, in part, funds the Department of Employment Services in furtherance of this responsibility.

Upon receipt and processing of a valid claim submitted to the Department of Employment Services, a claimant is eligible to receive up to \$9,334 over a six-month period, subject to various provisions and limitations. A claimant may receive unemployment

compensation benefits by one of two methods. A claimant may choose an electronic transfer of the funds directly from the Department of Employment Services to the claimant's bank account, by providing the bank account number and routing information on the initial application. Otherwise, a claimant may request to have a check mailed to an address provided by the claimant on the initial application. The primary piece of information used to validate the claim is the social security number provided with the claim. Once a claim has been processed and approved, a claimant must, on a weekly basis, certify by answering a series of questions that the claimant is still eligible to receive full unemployment compensation benefits as being provided under the claim.

On April 14, 2005, the defendant filed an internet application for unemployment compensation benefits with the Department of Employment Services and used a social security number that is fully known to the government, and was assigned by the Social Security Administration to another individual, who did not give the defendant permission to use its social security number to apply for unemployment compensation benefits. At the time the defendant filed the internet application on April 14, 2005, she knew that the social security number she used belonged to another person. The defendant received unemployment compensation benefits using that social security number from April 25, 2005 through October 24, 2005.

On November 5, 2006, the defendant filed another internet application for unemployment compensation benefits with the Department of Employment Services and used a social security number that is fully known to the government, and was assigned by the Social Security Administration to another individual, who did not give the defendant permission to use its social security number to apply for unemployment compensation benefits. At the time the defendant filed the internet application on November 5, 2006, she knew that the social security number she used belonged to another person. The defendant received unemployment compensation benefits using that social security number from November 20, 2006 through May 21, 2007.

During the time period November 27, 2004 through September 17, 2007, the defendant willfully and knowingly applied several times for unemployment compensation benefits with the Department of Employment Services using social security numbers assigned to other individuals. As a result of these applications, the defendant received money of the Department of Labor and the U.S. Treasury, namely unemployment compensation benefits, totaling at least \$77,680.00, by a combination of electronic transfers to her bank accounts and checks mailed to her. The applications for and receipt of these funds constituted Theft of Public Money. During the course of this felony violation, the defendant knowingly used, without lawful authority, a means of identification of two individuals, namely two social security numbers not assigned to the defendant, in order to illegally obtain federal government funds during the time periods April 14, 2005 through October 24, 2005, and November 20, 2006 through May 21, 2007.

In announcing the guilty plea, Acting U.S. Attorney Phillips, D.C. OIG Inspector General Willoughby, FBI Assistant Director in Charge Persichini, Jr., and DOL Inspector General Heddell commended the outstanding investigative work of D.C. OIG Special Agent Teddy Clark; the assigned FBI Special Agent; Special Agent David Fagnoli of the DOL Office of Labor Racketeering and Fraud Investigations; and Criminal Investigator Duncan Templeton of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia. They also praised the work of Assistant U.S. Attorneys Karla-Dee Clark, who investigated and prosecuted the case, and Jeffrey Pearlman and Stephen Spiegelhalter, who assisted in the prosecution, and legal assistants Latoya Davenport and Latoya Wade, and paralegal Teesha Tobias who assisted with the case.

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